

# **From Hand Tools to Mobile Phones: The Lun Dayeh and Technology in Central Highland Borneo\***

**By Daniel Chew and Jayl Langub, Institute of East Asian Studies, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak**

## **Introduction**

This paper sets out to explore how and why the Lun Dayeh<sup>1</sup> in Sarawak and East Kalimantan, inhabiting a contiguous highland area in the heart of central northeast Borneo, adapt to technology. Theories of modernization, notably by Rostow (1960), depict a society moving through different levels of under-development and development from the agrarian stage to the modern, technological and mass consumption age. Our case study of the Lun Dayeh may at first sight appear to fit into such an explanatory framework although we will set out to show that this lineal depiction of the progressive stages of development does not necessarily apply. This paper is a study of a community which handles the paradoxes of development, struggling to retain its unique *lati ba* (irrigated wet rice planting) form of agriculture and coming to terms with modernity and technology in the form of motorized transport and mobile phones.

We propose to use a socio-cultural explanatory framework to analyse the resilience of *lati ba* in the wake of pressure to adopt modern methods of agriculture. The selective rejection and adaptation of technology by the Lun Dayeh may also have a rational economic and environmental basis in the case of wet rice planting.

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<sup>1</sup> Lun Dayeh means "people of the uplands or interior". In Sarawak, the Lun Dayeh are also known as Lun Bawang, "people of the place". However, for the purposes of this paper and to avoid confusion the nomenclature Lun Dayeh is preferred. The Lun Dayeh and Lun Bawang are culturally and linguistically the same people speaking the Apad Wat language.